

# INTERNATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE 23



strikes in germany

riots in los angeles

**ONLY THE WORKING CLASS CAN PUT AN END TO  
CAPITALIST BARBARISM**

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# TOWARDS A NEW REVOLUTIONARY PLATFORM

The present period has been poor in class struggles but rich in the challenges posed to revolutionaries. The collapse of the Russian bloc, and of Stalinism as a mode of capitalist domination in the East, outside of either a period of war or revolution, the features of the new configuration of the capitalist world, present and to come, the downturn in class struggle and the proletariat's difficulties in developing its class consciousness, the growth of far right and fundamentalist ideologies, and the persistent crisis in the revolutionary milieu, are all so many factors which have undermined the certitude of the revolutionary movement as it had developed since the 1970's. Our Fraction confronted all of these issues at its recent Conference in May 1992, in the course of which the text "The Collapse of the Russian Bloc and the New World Order: Critical Balance Sheet and Perspectives", which appeared in IP #22, was adopted.

To take up that challenge, however, does not consist simply in adapting a pre-existent framework for analysis to a changing reality, and then continuing as before. To continue as a weapon of revolutionary critique, Marxism must continually re-forge itself in the fires of the social contradictions, and of its own contradictions, looking at its own bases so as to re-deploy itself more solidly than before. It is for that reason that our Conference was so concerned with both the *raison d'être* of our Fraction and of the general perspectives for our activity. Six and a half years after our formation, we believe that the time has come to draw a balance sheet of our work and to begin a new period in our political existence: that of the drafting of a new revolutionary platform adapted to the realities of the present epoch.

In constituting ourselves as a Fraction, we had sought "to emphasize the fact that the overcoming of the crisis in the revolutionary milieu could only be accomplished through a thoroughgoing, critical, examination of the weaknesses of that milieu, and one

not undertaken in haste". And we assigned ourselves the following tasks:

"1) To represent a programmatic and organic continuity with the pole of regroupment that the ICC used to be...

2) To draw the lessons of the experience of the ICC for the worker's movement and develop the necessary programmatic advances...

3) ...to establish a bridge between the old pole of regroupment of revolutionary forces that was the ICC and the new pole which will develop in the future course of class struggle" (IP #1, p.3)

These remain our basic tasks, but today they have become insufficient as such. If it remains necessary to assure the programmatic continuity with the pole of regroupment formerly represented by the ICC, to the extent that the latter constituted, through the clarification of its principles, the highest point attained by the emergent revolutionary movement after 1968, the accomplishment of a critical balance sheet of the experience of the ICC, and the programmatic enrichments which flow from it, must necessarily lead to an overcoming of the platform on the basis of which the ICC was first constituted. We have already identified a series of points which require much greater clarity today: the transformations that capital has undergone in its phase of decadence, and the evolution of state capitalism, notably with respect to the passage from the formal to the real domination of capital; the transformation undergone by the working class in state capitalism, and in the present phase of prolonged economic crisis; the process by which class consciousness develops in this context; the Marxist method of analyzing social reality. Moreover, the recent upheavals in the international situation demand that revolutionaries take a fresh look at the perspectives that they had traced for the present period and the one to come. Such an undertaking will involve new theoretical advances on questions such as imperialism and the existence of imperialist blocs, the alternative of war or revolution, and the growing globalization of capital.



Since the beginning of the new period of open crisis and class struggle twenty five years ago, and since the formation of the ICC seventeen years ago, both social reality and the perception of that reality by the proletariat and by revolutionaries has undergone considerable change. That's why we think that the drafting of a new revolutionary platform is an imperative task, and it is why our Conference set that task as one that we must accomplish in the period to come.

Our existence as an external fraction of the ICC was integrally linked to the tasks enumerated above. It is obvious that our existence as an external fraction of the ICC is destined to come to an end with the completion of that task, and in particular with the adoption of a new platform. The adoption of a new platform will mark the conclusion of the metamorphosis of our group, and the definition of its new tasks.

One question that generated a heated debate at our recent Conference was precisely the name or terms by which we designate our Fraction. Some comrades thought that we must immediately cease to call ourselves an "external fraction of the ICC". Several reasons were given in support of that position. First, the theoretical gap between the ICC and our Fraction has continuously widened, to the point where the existence of a common basis is today purely formal. Neither the ICC nor our Fraction any longer defend the old platform of the ICC, and our role can no longer be to defend the integrity of the latter against the regressions of the ICC. Second, our designation as a fraction of the ICC was mistaken from the very beginning for a number of reasons. In so doing, we followed the model of Bilan, though the concept of a fraction elaborated by it was already infected with Leninism (for Bilan, the fraction served to train the "cadres" for the future party). Inasmuch as the ICC was itself more a fraction than a party, our self-designation led to the absurdity that we were a "fraction" of a fraction. That self-designation was inspired by the view of the ICC according to which different organizations could not exist with the same platform, a mistaken view which instead of preventing the fragmentation of the milieu (which was its ostensible goal) ended up being utilized as an excuse for sectarianism. Third, our designation as a fraction of the ICC was an obstacle to our intervention, inasmuch as either very few of those we sought to reach had even heard of the ICC, or most of those who had were turned off the Fraction because of that connection.

Other comrades contended that most

of the arguments in favor of the above position had already been heard at the time of the formation of our Fraction, and that a change of name at the present time would be premature for several reasons. First, our Fraction never had as its primordial task the defense of the old platform of the ICC against that organization's own regression, but rather to get at the roots of the weaknesses of the ICC so as to enrich the programmatic bases on which it was constituted. The *raison d'être* for the Fraction would only disappear when that work had been completed, and we would be able to synthesize it in a new platform that went beyond the old. Second, We defended the concept of a Fraction elaborated by Bilan, but not as a model to be mechanically applied in the present period. At the time of the formation of our Fraction, we insisted on the fact that "the unique character of the present historical situation also imposes on us tasks which are qualitatively different from those of the Left Fractions in the period of counter-revolution". (IP #1, p.3) In particular we clearly separated ourselves from the Leninist conception (with which Bilan was impregnated), and insisted that the originality of our Fraction lay in our existence as a current representing a pole of regroupment within a larger political milieu. Doesn't our own experience demonstrate that the existence of a fraction with these characteristics is both possible and viable? Third, the question is less one of knowing what we want to be, than one of acknowledging what we really are. If we constituted ourselves as a "fraction of the ICC" at the time of our expulsion from that organization, it was not out of any love for that designation, but because we had no other coherent programmatic framework than the old platform of the ICC with which to define ourselves. The tasks of a fraction were imposed on us by necessity. And logically, the redefinition of such a coherent programmatic framework constitutes the real basis for a formal change in our name. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that our designation has really been an obstacle to our intervention: our name has not prevented numerous comrades from the outside coming to our public meetings and carrying on discussions with us.

At the end of the discussion of this question, the Conference voted to retain the name of the Fraction in the present period.

The drafting of a new revolutionary platform cannot be an act of voluntarism, but must be based on a real clarification of revolutionary principles. That is why we have not set a date for the completion

of this work, and have set the following as prerequisite tasks to it: to draw a balance sheet of the work that we have so far accomplished with respect to a critique of the weaknesses and regressions of the ICC, and of our own theoretical contributions; to identify the failings in the old platform of the ICC, and the requirements of a new platform adapted to our epoch; finally, to make clear the theoretical and political coherence that must ground our new platform.

A number of militants and revolutionary groups have already indicated their interest in this undertaking. We believe that this task

responds to a real need in the revolutionary milieu to re-evaluate the very bases for its existence and of its activity, and that this can only be enriched by the broadest possible exchange and confrontation of ideas. We therefore call on all militants and revolutionary groups interested in this work to actively participate in it by making contact with us, and by sending us their written contributions. Our Fraction will assure the circulation of written texts among the participating militants and groups.

M.L.

## **NATIONALISM AND RACISM**

# **EXPRESSIONS OF CAPITALIST CRISIS**

This May, the Fraction held public meetings in Brussels and Paris, around the theme of "class solidarity: against the false communities of nation, race and religion", which was based on an article which appeared in IP #21. These meetings were an opportunity to confront and discuss the analyses made by the ICC, the FOR, Mouvement Communiste, Transition, as well as by different individual comrades. For us, the function of such meetings today is to make possible a real discussion within the revolutionary milieu, a confrontation of different analyses and positions. Such discussions are a vital moment in our political work. The deepening of the questions raised at such meetings cannot generally occur on the spot, but the debates that arise can develop under other other forms, specifically in writing in the pages of the different publications. It is in that spirit, that we would like to once again take up the question of the growth of nationalist and racist ideologies.

This question is important for a number of reasons. The growth of nationalism throughout the world, and of the far right in the industrial heartlands of capitalism, together with the collapse of the Russian bloc, have transformed the political landscape over the past several years. No group in the revolutionary milieu had foreseen these developments; indeed, these developments

refute the perspectives that many revolutionaries had insisted on at the beginning of the '80's. The development of the class struggle in Europe at the end of the '70's, culminating in the mass strike in Poland in August 1980, had led the ICC, for example, to predict a vast development of worker's struggles in the advanced countries during the '80's -- a process that was to have served as the basis for an internationalization of struggles in the rest of the world. What was anticipated, therefore, was a "radicalization" of bourgeois ideology, in the direction of radical unionism, for example, so as to head off social discontent. With such a perspective, the far right was viewed as an anachronism, representing no danger to the proletariat. The least that one can say is that reality has demolished such conjectures. Instead of the anticipated internationalization of class struggle, we are today horror struck by the fratricidal conflict in Yugoslavia, and the growth of racism throughout the advanced capitalist world. All this only underscores the vital need to work out a new framework which will make it possible to grasp the meaning of these developments.

In this article, we want to explore the socio-political bases for the growth of racist and nationalist ideologies in the present period. In particular, we

want to focus on the following question: does this phenomenon mean that the proletariat is on the verge of rallying behind capitalist ideology to the point of being mobilized for "the defense of the fatherland" as was the case on the eve of World War Two, or does the development of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat still remain possible despite the growth of such ideologies? To answer that question, we want to discuss two points. What factor or factors explain the reappearance of nationalist and racist ideologies? What is the impact of these ideologies on the proletariat?

For Marxism, the roots of an ideology are not to be found in the domain of "ideas" themselves, but in the functioning of the capitalist economy, and in the social antagonisms that it engenders. Racism and nationalism, therefore, correspond to economic and political factors that must be identified.

Everywhere in the world, capitalism is confronted with the problem of valorization. The overproduction of commodities, not with respect to human needs, which are increasingly unsatisfied, but with respect to effective demand, results in a concentration of capital, rationalization, and modernization of the productive apparatus. There is a tendency to put the greatest burden onto the weakest countries, which can no longer even aspire to carve out a place for themselves on the world market. Thus, while the '70's saw the breakdown of the countries of the Third World, the '80's were the occasion for the breakdown of the countries of the "Second World", materialized in the dislocation of the Russian bloc. Nor has the crisis spared the countries of the "First World", where entire economic sectors have been abandoned or restructured, with -- as a consequence -- the development of unemployment on a massive scale (see the article on "The Necessary Recomposition of the Proletariat" in IP #22). Moreover, the colossal level of indebtedness of capitalist states has compelled them to reign in their financial support for the economy, and in particular for the labor market -- support that in prior downturns would have softened the impact of the crisis.

Capitalism has no future! While the real domination of capital expands its sway (see the article on "State Capitalism" in IP #7) the globalization of markets and of the system of production itself is accompanied not by an overall development, but, on the contrary, by an increase in underdevelopment, of poverty. That is how capitalism assured its survival over the

past decade. The increase in productivity as a result of the development of technology went hand in hand with an ever greater and more thoroughgoing devastation of the weaker economies, which lacked the means of production to be competitive on the world market, and which could not integrate their available labor-power into the productive system. The exclusion of masses of workers (i.e. those for whom the sale of their labor-power is their only means of survival) from the productive apparatus, which is the lot of the majority of the population of the under-developed countries, has encompassed the developed countries over the last decade, and will grow even more in the one to come. Capitalism is confronted with a growing overproduction of labor-power, the subsistence of which it can no longer assure either by wages or by unemployment and welfare benefits, which it is compelled to savagely cut.

Nationalism under its present form, or rather sub-nationalism or mini-nationalism, is the political expression of a hopeless reaction on the part of factions of the bourgeoisie of the weaker countries to the weakness of their national capital on the world market. The local mini-bourgeoisie hopes that by the separation of its capital from that of the national state to which it had belonged, or with respect to other economically weaker regions of that state, to be better able to resist the crisis. What occurs is a reduction of the productive base, which runs counter to the tendency of a concentration of capital which characterizes the present period. Thus, the formation of new nations today has a totally different meaning than that of the formation of nation-states in the ascendant phase of capitalism, when it was a matter of unification, and the centralization of capital over a given territory.

The development of racism and xenophobia is also economically determined. In a country like Yugoslavia, the racism directed at the non-Serbian population is reminiscent of the policy of the Nazis towards the Jews in the 30's (see "Auschwitz ou le grand alibi", Programme Communiste, #11, 1960), i.e. the elimination -- by fear or force -- of a part of the middle strata so as to appropriate its goods. A more general basis for racism, in both the underdeveloped and the developed countries, is the economic necessity for the capitalist class to rid itself of a part of the proletariat which exceeds the capacity for absorption of the productive apparatus.

We must insist that racism in the developed countries is not the preserve

of the parties of the far right, though such parties are more open in their support for it than other factions of the capitalist class. All the "democratic" parties of the bourgeoisie, when they are in power, adopt measures against immigrants: sending them back to their country of origin, halts to immigration, monetary bribes to "encourage" them to leave, etc. Wasn't it a French Socialist Prime Minister, Edith Cresson, who proposed packing immigrants onto charter flights "home"? Wasn't it democratic Italy, which last August shipped the Albanian refugees back across the Adriatic? Isn't it democratic Austria that has decided to make immigration more difficult in the face of a flood of refugees from the East? The necessity for the capitalist class to generalize policies to exclude a part of the working class from the productive process, therefore, constitutes the basis for the development of racist ideologies. Therefore, the rise of far right parties is not something alien to the democratic system, as the traditional factions of the capitalist class would like to make us think, with all their efforts to separate themselves from the "brown beast". The policy of excluding a part of the working class from the process of production is reminiscent of the one followed between the two wars not only by the German state towards the Jews, but also by very "democratic" nations, such as France and the US, with respect to immigrants of whatever nationality. We need only to recall the measures taken by France before World War Two: in 1934-35, quotas for foreign workers in specified branches of industry and commerce; in 1938, facilitation of the process of expulsion under the pretext of a struggle against "illegal immigration"; internment camps for Spanish refugees. In the face of the crisis, the bourgeoisie is now utilizing the very same words, and the very same actions, that it swore -- after the Holocaust -- to remove forever from the vocabulary and action of humanity.

The second issue that it is necessary to analyze is the impact of the growth of racist and nationalist ideologies on the proletariat. For Marxism, racist and nationalist ideologies are fundamentally alien to the proletariat, a class which is the bearer of a system of production based on the satisfaction of human needs, the constitution of which will entail the abolition of classes and of nations. Nonetheless, the revolutionary nature of the proletariat does not guarantee that it will not be affected by the ideologies of the society in which it lives. It is only at moments of open struggle against the existing system that the proletariat

can affirm its revolutionary nature in the form of class solidarity. In periods when the class struggle is weak, such as the one through which we are now living, the class consciousness of the proletariat regresses, at least outwardly; the working class is atomized, there is a tendency for it to be broken up into a sum of individuals, and, as a result, to become more subject to the sway of bourgeois ideology.

It would be foolish to deny that racist and nationalist ideas have an impact on the proletariat today. In a country such as Yugoslavia, the workers, who a few years ago struggled together for the defense of their class interests, have now been mobilized for the defense of their region or nationality. However, it is necessary to add that, lacking sufficient information, it is difficult to evaluate to what extent the proletariat in that part of the world has been defeated, or whether or not it is still capable of reacting against capitalist barbarism. But the effect of such ideologies is not limited to underdeveloped countries. In the industrial heartlands, racism has also had an impact on the proletariat. The growth of the National Front in France, of far right parties in Belgium, cannot be understood solely in terms of the votes of strata outside the working class. To fail to see that, is to grossly under-estimate the difficulties on the way to the development of class consciousness today.

Today, the capitalist class understands the impossibility of extricating the system from the economic crisis in which it finds itself, of resolving the problem of unemployment. It is mesmerized by the prospect of thrusting the worst effects of the crisis onto a part of the working class: blacks in the US, immigrants in Europe.

Such a strategy contains several dangers for the development of class consciousness. First, unemployment, and a fall in the standard of living, are problems that affect the whole working class, and not merely a minority of it. Ideologies which claim that workers of the majority nationality are hurt by the fact that immigrants or minorities take "their" jobs and social benefits, cannot hide the fact that it is the whole working class that is under attack today, and that such an attack requires a united response on the part of all the exploited. The second -- and perhaps greatest -- danger is that these ideologies link the workers to those who exploit them. If workers are convinced by those who pretend to fight for their security by shifting the weight of the crisis onto the backs of the Others, they will deliver themselves, bound and

gagged, to their executioners. The example of nationalism illustrates this perfectly: workers who adhere to Serb, Croat, or Bosnian nationalism in the hope that an illusory political and economic independence will relieve the weight of the crisis, will get from the bourgeoisie only war and impoverishment.

However, the impact of nationalist and racist ideologies on the proletariat of the developed countries remains limited for several reasons. First, it would be a mistake to think that voting statistics measure the consciousness of the working class. A general phenomenon of recent elections, in France, Belgium and Italy, has been a lack of credibility for the electoral system in general (seen in the growth in the numbers who don't vote) and of the traditional parties in particular.

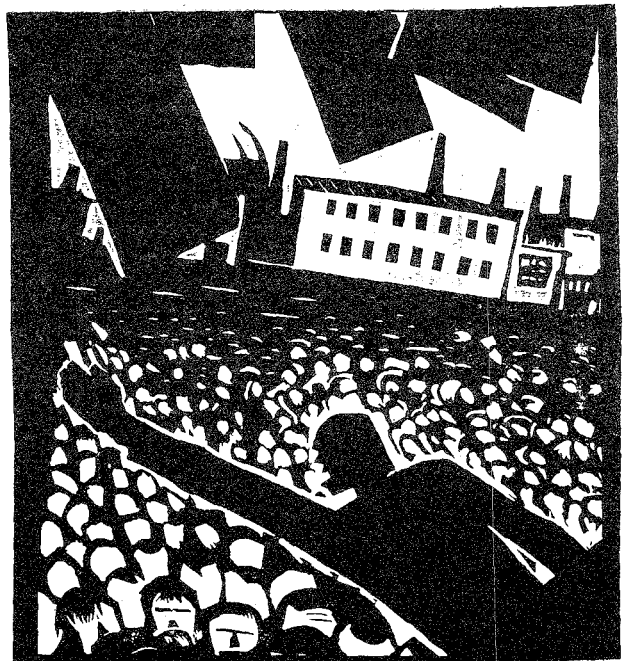
Another, and more important, point is the fact that nationalist and racist ideologies -- contrary to what happened in the '30's -- are incapable of really mobilizing the workers of the advanced countries today. Several crucial points distinguish the situation today from that of the '30's. First, the overall dynamic in which the proletariat finds itself. While the proletariat of the '30's had suffered an historic defeat, the crushing of its revolutionary elan of the years 1917-1923, the combativity of the proletariat of the advanced countries today is intact, and manifests itself by the continuation of the struggle against the reduction in its standard of living (see the article on the strikes in Germany in this issue). Another difference resides in economic policy. Fascism was the bearer of an economic program that, at least in appearance, permitted it to surmount the effects of the crisis (rehiring of the unemployed, recovery of production) by the expansion of state intervention into the economy, and in particular through the war economy. In the course of recent decades, the growth in armaments production, and the stimulation of production through recourse to credit has already been utilized to the point where they now represent too heavy a burden on the economy, so that everywhere in the world capitalist states have been forced to cut back their intervention into the economy (see the article "Privatizations and State Capitalism" in IP #10). It is clear that the programs defended by the far right parties today contain no "magic bullet" with which to even make a pretense of curing the disease that is devastating the capitalist economy.

It follows from all that has been said, that the rise of racist and nationalist ideologies does not mean that the proletariat is condemned to follow

them, and to give up defending its own class interests. If the workers of the underdeveloped countries seem in part to be mobilized by this sort of ideology, it is not the same in the developed countries. In the latter, what seems to be the case is that racist and nationalist ideologies sow confusion, and disarray, in a period in which the proletariat experiences difficulty in affirming its revolutionary perspective, and in developing its struggles.

More than ever, the present situation shows us that the alternative to the growing barbarism, the proletarian revolution, must emerge in countries where the productive forces, and in particular, the proletariat, have known the highest degree of development. The struggle of the proletariat of the industrial heartlands can not only relegate nationalist and racist ideologies to the dust-bin of history, but can also provide the decisive impulse for the proletariat of the less developed countries to renew the struggle on their own class terrain.

ADELE





## THE LOS ANGELES RIOTS

# Social Revolt and Racial Hatred

The violent upheavals in Los Angeles, that began on the night of April 29, were the most serious examples of civic unrest in the US in decades. Coming after a decade in which leftists turned liberals, in both the corridors of political power and at the heights of the cultural and academic establishment, had proclaimed the bankruptcy of Marxism, and the virtues of civil society and "democratic" politics, the upheavals in LA have demonstrated that it is not Marxism, but capitalism that is bankrupt; that beneath the tattered remnants of civil society and the thin facade of democracy, it is degradation, poverty and misery that is the lot of the inhabitants of the urban nightmare of capitalism in these last years of the millennium. Moreover, if there are conditions specific to LA, the rapid spread of the unrest to other urban centers in the US (San Francisco, Las Vegas, Omaha, Atlanta) made it clear that urban America is a tinderbox. Nor are these conditions confined to the US. LA is the future of the urban agglomerations throughout the advanced industrialized metropolises in this epoch of decadent capitalism: from Brixton in London, to the bidonvilles around Paris, the same conditions of desperation and poverty that sparked the upheavals in LA are flourishing. Moreover, the gap that has historically separated the cities of the capitalist metropolises from their urban cousins in the Third World is fast being closed: it is increasingly difficult to tell the difference between the inner cities of America and the favelas of Rio.

The link between the upheavals in LA and the crisis of capitalism is undeniable. South Central LA, where the upheavals began, is the only future that capitalism has for an exponentially growing number of its people. There the permanently unemployed and marginal population created by the high-tech capitalism of this fin de siècle, expelled from the immediate process of production, largely African-American, a legacy of slavery and America's unique caste system, mingle with the new immigrants from Central America who work in the sweat shops which employ illegal aliens at below the minimum wage; there live the service and unskilled workers (black and Latino) that are still required as an ancillary to an economy that is increasingly based on the highly skilled and extremely productive labor employed in the state of the art factories far from the inner cities. If these conditions were not sufficient to breed despair, rage, and hopelessness, amidst an urban landscape

increasingly dominated by street gangs, crime and drugs, the victims of which are the very inhabitants of these neighborhoods, the recession of the past several years has eliminated tens of thousands of the very jobs which originally drew the population of these neighborhoods to LA in the first place.

It is these conditions, endemic to capitalism in its phase of senility, that produced the upheavals whose immediate spark was the not guilty verdict in the notorious case of police brutality against Rodney King. The King verdict, and the crime which gave rise to it, is but another manifestation of the same crisis of capitalism as it manifests itself in the inner cities of America. Faced with the absolute breakdown of civil society in the inner cities, the authorities have increasingly reacted with police repression. In LA, this phenomenon has been especially pronounced, with the LAPD under chief Darryl Gates acting as an army of occupation, subjecting the inhabitants of the ghetto to a veritable reign of terror, with African Americans (like Rodney King) its favorite targets.

If the upheavals in LA were the product of the decadence of capitalism, does this mean that they were an expression of class struggle, that they were stamped by an emancipatory potential? And if not, were they merely an expression of nihilistic rage, the anti-social response of a population reduced to the level of savages? The answer to both questions is NO. It is difficult to find the elements of a class struggle directed at capitalism, in the debris of burned out and looted stores in LA; it is impossible to find an emancipatory content in the drive-by shootings, in the beatings and murders of motorists in South Central LA, or in the deliberate attacks aimed at Koreans as Koreans that turned the Korea Town neighborhood into a battlefield. This latter bears more of a resemblance to the pogroms launched by the Black Hundreds against Jews in Tsarist Russia (which also emanated from the most wretched sectors of the Russian populace) than to the storming of the Winter Palace or the Paris commune. Yet those in authority and in the media, who saw only an undifferentiated savagery and nihilism in the streets of LA, are no less wrong than the academic and leftist cheerleaders of the Crips and Bloods (the black gangs) who are now being celebrated as proletarian heroes (sic.) in the expensive townhouses of the literati. In order to take the full measure of the upheavals, it is

necessary to distinguish between the murders and beatings at the intersection of Florence and Normandie the night of April 29, the drive-by-shootings most of the victims of which were black, and the attacks on Koreans on the one hand, and the looting of stores by inter-racial crowds the next day, much of which -- futile though it was politically -- had a carnival atmosphere, was directed at property not persons, and was the response of an impoverished population to an opportunity to take free goods, on the other. The reduction of all these very different manifestations of discontent to an undifferentiated sameness may serve the interests of leftists who want to reduce the murder of a white truck driver because he was white to the stealing of food, and declare it all a revolt against capital; it may serve the interests of conservatives who want to see in the gang bangers and those who took canned food, the same savages whose daily existence is a threat to innocent people, and who must at all costs be repressed. It does not serve the interest of separating what in the upheavals may be the germs of a threat to capital, from what can only reinforce its murderous stranglehold.

To that end, it is particularly instructive to look at two events that occurred on the night of April 29, one little reported or commented on in the media, the other splashed across the front pages of every newspaper in the world and broadcast by every TV network. At more or less the same time that a crowd of gang bangers began to confront the police at the intersection of Florence and Normandie in South Central LA, a large inter-racial (though predominantly black) crowd was gathering at police headquarters in downtown LA. In contrast to the gang bangers at Florence and Normandie, this crowd represented a cross section of the community, much of which was working class. The confrontation at police headquarters quickly turned violent, a violence directed at the most visible and hated symbol of capitalist rule and repression in the city. It was not directed at whites or Asians, but at the police (of all colors) and the system whose agents they were. At virtually the same moment, the police withdrew from the intersection of Florence and Normandie (to reinforce the police defending the headquarters of the LAPD?), and within minutes the gang bangers were attacking motorists and truckdrivers who happened into the intersection (while police who drove by were not touched), torching stores (particularly those owned by Koreans), and somewhat later extending their operations into an assault on Korea Town. As LA went up in smoke, the crowd at police headquarters melted away, and throughout the next day the symbols of capitalist authority were never again threatened, even as the property of the petty bourgeoisie was targeted.

If the desperation of the populace of the inner cities, condemned to poverty and disease, is to be directed at the cause of its plight, capitalism, it will have to seek its target in the symbols of capitalist class rule, the police headquarters, city halls, municipal buildings, courts and corporate headquarters, whose ugly post-modernist buildings scar the urban landscape. There it will threaten the system whose very existence creates the misery that provokes such upheavals. As long as the violence is directed at small stores and shopkeepers (however venal these latter may be as individuals), at racial Others, it will constitute no threat to the capitalist order. If the rage and desperation of those condemned to live in the inner cities can link up with the struggles of the collective laborer who produces the surplus-value on which the continuation of the capitalist accumulation process depends, it indeed will be a source of emancipatory potential. If that same rage and desperation is dragooned by the gang bangers into pogroms, drive-by-shootings, and a struggle over turf between the police and the Crips and Bloods, the emancipatory potential that exists in the inner cities will be extinguished. If no anti-capitalist struggle can ignore the suffering and the emancipatory potential that is found in the inner cities, besides the repressive power of the police, the reign of the gang bangers is the best guarantee that such a struggle will not flower in the urban slums of late capitalism.

MAC INTOSH

# STRIKES IN GERMANY

For many years Germany has been portrayed as the model of economic expansion and stability. The collaboration between business and unions in the control of the working class was seen as exemplary. But this past spring another wall collapsed in Germany: a wall of lies presenting the working class as happily enjoying the wonders of the "consumer society". The strike in the public sector and the unrest in the steel industry ripped to pieces the myths of the advocates of social peace.

For many years, the "Iron Curtain" allowed a systematic campaign of mystification against the workers, both in the West and the East. But the deepening of the economic crisis and the exacerbation of competition forced the Kremlin to use other weapons than ideological diktats to organize exploitation. Stalinist centralism gave way to Perestroika and democratic mystifications. The opening of the Berlin wall, imposed by Gorbachev, became the symbol of the victory of the West over Stalinist tyranny. The reunification of Germany, expected by nobody, became reality.

But since then, the triumphalist speeches have ceased, the bankers have done their sums, and the bill is steep. The integration of the ex-GDR became an enormous financial burden for the German economy. The Bundesbank warned the German bourgeoisie that its social policies had to change to stem the rising budget deficits.

The message has changed. Now the bourgeoisie preaches solidarity: sacrifices are necessary to reconstruct capitalism in the East. This pseudo-solidarity serves to justify draconian austerity-measures against the working class.

It's a dangerous mystification because it exploits a real feeling within the working class. In the class struggle, solidarity is not an empty word. But the German workers have not swallowed the solidarity-appeals from the mass media and went on strike against the austerity-measures. The protest movement remained under the control of the trade unions, which emphasized the need to accept negotiations, to talk about the minimal proposals of the state. The legalism of the unionist approach encapsulated the struggle. But at the same time, a new will to fight emerged.

Only in the struggle can a real solidarity-movement develop. Only by

fighting for the living conditions of all, can workers go beyond the particularities of their specific situation, as they did in Germany. The movement was a wake up call for the working class in Germany, refusing to accept sacrifices, avoiding the trap of the false solidarity with the restructuring of capitalism in the East.

For public sector workers, any strike movement implies overcoming the fear of committing an illegal act. The workers braved the interdictions and confronted the unions which were well prepared to maintain a tight control over the movement and to deflect it towards negotiation. Indeed, while the workers demanded a 9,5 % wage increase, as opposed to the state's offer of 3,5 %, the unions negotiated for a raise of 5,4 %. But the federal state refused this proposal, saying 4,7 % was the absolute ceiling. A tug of war seemed in the offing. But then the Kohl-government, which lacked the experience of a Thatcher, conceded and accepted the trade union proposal.

The threat of an extension of the strike movement towards the steel sector was probably a decisive factor in the outcome. Yet it wasn't a victory for the workers. The federal state could no longer use the opposition between East and West, the defense of democracy etc. to divide workers in both parts of the country. But it could count fully on the unions to prevent an extension of the strike to other sectors and to workers in the East. The workers avoided the trap of false solidarity and made a first step towards real solidarity by fighting collectively against austerity. But they didn't break through the limits imposed by the unions and didn't express any concrete solidarity with the workers in the East. So if the bourgeoisie made a political concession, it didn't concede anything economically.

But despite its limits and the trade unionist stranglehold, the movement showed how wrong the bourgeois ideologues are with their talk about "the end of history". The working class of Germany, despite its weaknesses and hesitations, reminded the world that the class struggle hasn't died, that the antagonisms between the classes continue, that in the struggle, attempts to divide the workers through nationalism and regionalism are losing some influence.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

# Who is the Working Class?

The following text continues the debate which we opened in the pages of IP. With the article "The reconstitution of the classes under State Capitalism" (IP # 15) we wanted to reaffirm the fundamental Marxist positions on the revolutionary nature of the working class, the exploited class in capitalism. But we also wanted to begin the very necessary reflection on the changes in the make-up of this class, linked to the global evolution of capitalism and specifically of its existence under the form of state capitalism.

This debate is neither "academic" nor "sociological", despite the claims of some in the revolutionary milieu. On the contrary it should help us to respond to a very real need: to understand why the working class finds it so difficult to express openly its revolutionary consciousness, despite capitalism's deepening historical crisis. This debate will be decisive for our existence as a revolutionary minority and for our intervention in the class whose historical perspective we defend.

TM's text develops some of the ideas of the article in IP # 15: the working class is not "disappearing" as some fashionable theories claim. The extension of the application of the law of value to the totality of production and social life has rather enlarged the working class, even if this growth has made it more difficult for the class to recognize itself.

TM's article also contains some ideas with which we disagree. The author thinks it's useless or intellectualistic to analyse the reconstitution of the working class economically. What characterizes the working class in TM's view, is not that it produces surplus value but that it produces everything. These are formulations we reject. The general deductions Marx made about the revolutionary nature of the working class flowed from a global analysis of this class, economically as well as politically. (The intellectual journey of Marx shows this. While he was at first mainly concerned with philosophy, he felt the pressing need to base his vision of the proletariat on a strictly economic analysis of the functioning of capitalism). Furthermore, such an approach does not address the question which many in the revolutionary milieu pose: are only the "productive" workers

(those who directly produce surplus value) a part of the working class? (Those who think so, see the working class as shrinking).

For us it seems important to demonstrate economically how capitalism has evolved and how its transition to "real domination" of society has led to the emergence of the "collective worker" (whom Marx foresaw). Not only the workers who are the direct source of surplus value are proletarians, but the totality of producers who are part of the chain of the valorisation of capital and who participate, more or less, in the global production of capital. You can't skirt around the problem of surplus value.

Also, in the course of the article, T.M. gives a somewhat mythical and gargantuan vision of the "productive" worker, supposedly closer to the "human needs" (seen in a historical way) and therefore, more capable to recognize and express his revolutionary nature. We want to stay clear from an idealistic view of the worker close to the "noble savage", with whom he would share his innocence and unchangeable nature.

Finally, while we agree with the general idea of this article, of an extension of the working class, it doesn't take into account another tendency brought forth by capitalism's crisis: the exclusion from production, especially in the peripheral countries, of a large number of people who never were in the objective possibility to sell their labor force. How can these layers be integrated in a revolutionary dynamic? That's another crucial question which must be analysed. It's indispensable to pursue the debate on all these questions. All contributions are welcome.

This text is a contribution to the discussion begun in the pages of IP on "The Recomposition of the Proletariat" (Internationalist Perspective # 15, 21, 22). IP is absolutely right to consider this a very important debate. The whole validity of marxism as a revolutionary theory rests on the idea that capitalism not only forges the weapons that will destroy it (the productive forces that prepare the way towards communism), but also creates the human beings who will use these weapons against the system: the proletariat. Although capitalism

today is leading mankind farther and farther into catastrophe, this revolutionary perspective is nowhere on the horizon. It's easy to see how important such a discussion can be; its aim should be to arrive at a clear definition of who the proletariat actually is in our time because that is what is so sorely needed.

Today the proletariat no longer recognizes itself as such. Contrary to the claims of a certain type of marxism, the defensive struggles provoked by the crisis of capitalism have not led to an awakening of class consciousness, the awareness of being part of one united class. Even in the midst of very combative strikes, workers can be heard saying things like, "I'm not a proletarian, I'm a train conductor"; "we are not workers, we're nurses" or "we are not workers, we have four years of university". According to the old clichés of the 19th century, "when you get a higher education, you are no longer workers". Diplomas and degrees are tickets out of the working class.

Furthermore, the horrors of stalinism, which named itself "the dictatorship of the proletariat", have only added to the general confusion. If the dictatorship of the proletariat leads to such barbarity, then let's be anything but proletarians!

The text published in IP # 15 called "The Recomposition of the Classes Under State Capitalism" (which I recommend to all readers) shows that in the era of state capitalism, "it is anachronistic to see the proletariat as composed only of workers accomplishing manual or purely mechanistic jobs in heavy industry". This present text goes in the same direction as that article.

#### THE PROLETARIAT AND UNSKILLED WORKERS

Why did the terms "proletarian" and "unskilled worker" become synonymous? This identification is so firmly anchored in our minds that it prevents us from recognizing who is really in the working class and who is not.

The definition of the proletariat given by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto is: "the proletariat is the class of modern workers who live only so long as they can find work and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers who must sell themselves piecemeal are a commodity, like any other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market."

Unfortunately, the only part that has been generally retained from this definition is the part about "a modern laborer forced to sell himself

piecemeal". This may be one of the factors that led to seeing proletarians as only manual laborers. But the basic characteristic of the proletariat is to be wage labor and this condition has spread and developed all over society today, in all fields, whether they deal with manual or intellectual labor.

Marx and Engels spoke of "modern workers forced to sell themselves piecemeal" but in their context, the term "modern" referred to the "modern era that saw the transformation from the artisan's shop to the large factories of industrial capitalism. The mass of workers are piled into factories and organized along military lines." This is the form the proletariat took in the 19th century as it was described by Engels in The Condition of the Working Class in England and generally by the literature of that period. All this contributed to imprinting on our minds the idea of the proletariat as the hard labor brutes of capitalism. This is what capitalism looked like in the past and still resembles to some extent, particularly in the more recently industrialized areas of the globe.

But from a political point of view, if this definition is so mired in our consciousness, it is not just the fault of the words in The Communist Manifesto because this work was only the beginning of the whole history of the workers' movement with more than a century of organizations and theoreticians. The two great currents of thought that represented the proletariat at the beginning of the 20th century, the Socialist parties and the Communist parties, were the products of that kind of proletariat: the manual workers, the proletariat of mass production factories which was still a minority in capitalist society. When this class didn't have the strength to take control of the productive forces in a direct, united and collective way, it secreted parties whose task became to represent the workers in the bourgeois State. These parties very quickly became famous in capitalism for their ability to attach the proletariat to the interests of the nation and thus, of capital. These parties quite naturally reiterated, theorized and inculcated this narrow vision of the proletariat because, in the last analysis, it suited them. It kept the proletariat in a position of weakness and dependency and, at the same time, justified the idea that the workers were not capable of taking their destiny into their own hands, that only "specialized and experienced parties" could represent their interests. This is how these parties forged a place for themselves in the capitalist class and, of course, it was to their advantage to



project a narrow, weak and vulnerable image of the proletariat so as to maintain their own power.

But we would have to admit that many people we consider revolutionary marxists also contribute to this mystification, consciously or not, either because of a dogmatic and sclerotic vision of marxism or because of a fixation on the Russian revolution or both.

#### THE MARXIST VISION OF THE PROLETARIAT

Marx dealt with the proletariat from two different angles depending on whether he wanted to discuss the economic functioning of capitalism or the fact that the proletariat would be the gravedigger of capitalism. In the first instance, the economic analysis, he wanted to show that the main source of capitalist profit is the exploitation of living labor, the extraction of surplus value. In the second, political case, the aim was to show why and how the conditions capitalism creates for the proletariat not only place it at the heart of production, giving the proletariat the possibility of taking control, but also push it to revolt against the existing social order.

In our discussions today, we are trying to find out who is part of the proletariat and whether or not this class is still capable of accomplishing the historic revolution that marxism claims for it. In this sense, we are not interested in the proletariat as an "economic category" but in its social and political aspect. It is human beings who make history and not abstract entities.

There are many marxists, more deserving of the adjective "academic" than "revolutionary", who write huge tomes about how only those who "produce surplus value" or do "productive work" can be called proletarians. The article in IP #15 shows the absurdity of this kind of reasoning. These aspects are very important to understand the functioning of the capitalist economy or to calculate the profitability of capital. But when we look at things from the point of view of the communist revolution, whose objective is production to meet the real needs of human beings and not for profit, what becomes important is not the fact that the proletariat produces surplus value but the fact that he is the producer of everything --or, to be more exact, the producer of most of what society needs to function because today even agriculture has been largely "industrialized". The proletariat is the class to which capitalists pay a wage so that it will make the productive forces work to the specifications of the capitalist class. By definition, the entire functioning of

society is due to the work of the proletariat. That is why it has the potential to put the productive forces of society at the service of the real needs of mankind. That is why this class is the "revolutionary class".

In the same article, you write, "Even though certain groups, like the ICC, implicitly base their analyses and interventions in today's working class on a vision of the class that differs from the one Marx had last century, there is no explicit reference to this transformation or any attempt at a coherent explanation of it and its effects on the working class". In my experience in the ICC, there was a complete refusal to deepen this question of the transformations in the proletariat with the excuse that "the proletariat does not need us to tell them who they are" or "only petty bourgeois elements outside of the class would even raise such an issue". In sum, Marx said everything we have to know on this subject and people who want to say something more are just "modernists" or "humanists", who put themselves outside the proletarian camp because they are abandoning marxism by questioning the revolutionary nature of the proletariat.

In fact, the term "modernist" was meant to criticize (and correctly so) theories which rejected the dogmatic version of marxism only to conclude that marxism itself was dead because the classes we see today do not resemble the classes described in the 19th century. These theories talked about the "integration" of the proletariat, the idea that it has joined the bourgeoisie or even just disappeared from the scene of history. Such conclusions merely deprived us of the very method that can explain the evolution of society and the pathways of its transformation. But very soon, the word "modernist" became just another insult, another anathema, that the ICC used against any group that does not agree with its vision of the proletariat.

The ICC's refusal to deal with these transformations in the working class has led to a dogmatic attitude of its own, where it is not necessary to try to analyze things and understand them but where you have to "believe" in the proletariat. This means that in the pages of the ICC press, the working class appears as an increasingly abstract and idealized entity, a savior, a sort of Zorro who will come to free us, impelled by the effects of the economic crisis. No one can recognize himself as being a part of this proletariat because the proletariat's weaknesses, its errors, its disorientation are never its own fault but always the result of the evil "machievellian manipulations" of the bourgeoisie to prevent the proletariat

from fulfilling its historic mission". All of a sudden, it is the bourgeoisie that seems to be the class conscious of a revolutionary potential while the proletariat is content to remain in the dark. This gives a terrifying picture of the world, where the only conscious subject is the class enemy!

An article in Weltrevolution, the publication of the ICC in Germany, (republished in RI in France, May 1992) called "Why is the Proletariat the Revolutionary Class" is a good example of the unresolved contradictions of the ICC position on the composition of the proletariat in our time. Among many correct things that were written there, we can choose this : "the modern proletariat is not characterized by its ignorance or grossness, as some people who pine for the romantic revolutions of the early days of capitalism claim, and think that the revolution is therefore no longer possible; the proletariat is characterized today by a high degree of education and training". But at the same time, the article goes on to say that the true proletariat is only those who work in the factories, the classic working class, and that anyone else is just "typical petty bourgeois who think themselves so superior".

On the contrary, one of the major weaknesses in the proletariat, and one that the dominant ideology is constantly stressing, is this idea that if you don't get your hands dirty at work, if your job involves a certain amount of thought, if you received a higher education or if you earn a good salary "you are no longer a proletarian" that you have become "a petty bourgeois" or a part of the great "middle class". This only contributes to creating a sense of powerlessness in terms of ever being able to confront or destroy capitalism, because "only the proletariat can destroy it" and so few see themselves as part of the proletariat.

This fixation on unskilled industrial labor which is typical of almost all revolutionaries is not an accident. It comes from history itself because the industrial proletariat was always the spearhead of all proletarian revolutions (all of them defeated in one way or another, it might be interesting to remember). It will probably be the spearhead in the future, too, for the following very practical reasons :

- industrial workers work under the most difficult conditions and are generally the lowest paid;
- when many people are herded together in the same place and suffer from the same obvious conditions of exploitation, it is

easier to understand the meaning and importance of solidarity and unity;

- unskilled workers are, by definition, the least "educated" and that means they are less "deformed" by bourgeois "education" whose aim is to create docile citizens and make people conform to the rules of capitalist society. In this sense, unskilled workers are closer to the essential nature of human beings: the need for food, clothing, shelter, the need to love and be loved, to be useful, to learn...the need to live. That is why they are more likely to fight directly for a good cause, the defense of the right to live, to enjoy life and not be misled by the "economic needs of the company" that make the interests of capital come before the interests of mankind.

But these characteristics were particularly clear in the past when the world of the workers and the world of the bourgeoisie were really two separate worlds. Today, all workers have the capitalist state right there in their homes, in the form of a TV with all the ideological intoxication one could ever need. Above all, as the texts on the recomposition of the proletariat in IP all point out, the evolution of capitalism has transformed this reality. The history of recent years has put all the old ideas from the 1917 revolutionary wave into question and shown that the idealization of the industrial proletariat as the savior of humanity is hardly a program.

To get back to the definition of the proletariat, I think the one in The Communist Manifesto remains entirely valid : " The proletariat is that class of people who live only so long as they find work and who can only find work only so long as their labor increases capital. These laborers are a commodity, like any other article of commerce and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market."

Who can escape this definition today? Very few people, if you think about it. Contrary to popular belief, the proletariat is not steadily shrinking. If we use this definition, the proletariat has become the vast majority of the population on earth. This is a basic consequence of the growth of "the real domination of capital" described in the article called "State Capitalism" in IP #7.

Thus, the proletariat presents itself with such diversity, such heterogeneity, that things become quite complicated. We find ourselves with a proletariat that includes not only unskilled factory workers but all the "intellectual

workers" who do not see themselves as proletarians as well as the immense masses of people who want to sell their labor power but cannot find any buyers because decadent capitalism cannot integrate them into the process of production.

This raises many questions, most of which will have to wait for a future article. We will end by dealing with two aspects of this definition which are very general but nevertheless essential to an understanding of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat today.

#### A "NEW HUMAN BEING" IN HISTORY

At first glance, we could conclude that the definition from The Communist Manifesto was too vague to be of any real use. We tend to think that "life was always like this"--that you "always had to find work if you wanted to live". But this is not true. Before capitalism, social relations were not like this. Older societies were composed of much smaller and more autonomous human communities because the productive forces were so much less developed. Feeding yourself depended more directly on nature, on agriculture and raising animals. Social and political life inside these communities was, therefore, rigidly structured. You were born a slave or the head of a clan, a shepherd or a shoemaker, an aristocrat or a serf, and that is what you remained for the rest of your life with the exception of some very rare cases. You belonged to your community and you shared its very limited vision of the world. You could only be "a free man" if you owned some property (a shop, land to cultivate, some means of production) so that you could enter into commercial relations with others. The "free man" who could go from place to place looking to sell his labor power for a wage which would allow him, to one degree or another, to live, did not exist then. He is a creation of capitalism which needed "free" men available to run its machines. That's why capitalism did everything it could to destroy the old communities so as to get a hold on these "empty-handed" proletarians who have no other choice but to sell their labor power to live.

Of course, the "freedom" of the proletariat is like the "freedom" of a caged bird that cannot stop flapping its wings. But the proletariat is still a "new human being" in history. A human being capable of developing the dignity of a free man, capable of an open mind and a thirst for knowledge because he can work the most complex and highly developed productive forces in human history. A "universal man" (in the sense

that this human being extends across the entire surface of the globe) because capitalist social relations have become universal, capable of adapting to all situations because capitalism makes this necessary. A human being who has a sense of solidarity, a feeling for the collectivity because he is only one link in the enormous chain that assures production. A human being who does not need to conquer other men but only the productive forces to satisfy his needs as a human being.

What is the common interest of this proletariat, these people that capitalism "has made into commodities, an article of commerce like any other, that are exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition and the fluctuations of the market"? An interest in being able to truly become human beings and not commodities. The laws of decadent capitalism have made human beings the "commodity" that suffers from the greatest overproduction in this world with all the horror and pain that contains for the present and the future.

But what is man's own is his ability to think, his consciousness, and his ability to make predictions about what will happen. (1) For the proletariat, this means developing the consciousness that it is a class capable of eliminating capitalism and developing a society for human beings, the communist society.

T.M.

(1) "A spider does things that look like what a weaver does, and the beauty of the wax cells of a bee can astound the architect. But what separates the worst architect from even the best bee is that human beings can build a cell in their heads before they build it in the hive. The final product of labor exists beforehand in ideal form in the mind and imagination of the worker. He is not simply changing the forms of natural material. He is realizing his own deliberate goal, according to the means he has decided, using his own conscious will. (A quote from Marx's Capital on what differentiates mankind from animals.)

**Contribution to a Conference  
called by Kamunist Kranti**

# **The Tasks of Marxist Revolutionaries Today**

The following text was written for a conference called by Kamunist Kranti, a revolutionary organization based in India.

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For most of the past decade the practice of Marxist revolutionary organizations, the heirs of the Communist Left, which arose in opposition to the policies of the Communist International in the early and mid 1920's, has consisted of a wholesale abandonment of the tasks of Marxist THEORY. In place of the development of Marxist theory, the theoretical confrontation with the effects of the profound transformation of the capitalist mode of production over the past several decades, most of these organizations devoted themselves to the task of organization building (creating cadre) and preparing to play their self-appointed role of vanguard of the revolution, understood in Leninist terms as constituting the general staff of the proletariat, and directing its praxis. In ignoring the vital theoretical tasks which faced them, these organizations failed to create "cadre" (if by that one means revolutionaries able to participate in the task of the development of Marxist theory and in the elaboration of the communist program) even where they increased their membership. As far as playing the role a vanguard, these organizations directed no class movements, became increasingly cut off from the life and concerns of the working class, and by their very repudiation of their theoretical tasks, severely diminished the possibility of ever playing an active role in the class movements to come.

The External Fraction of the ICC (Internationalist Perspective) is convinced that the fundamental problem facing Marxist revolutionaries today is the need to theoretically grasp the profound changes in the organization of capital, and in the capitalist accumulation process, that have occurred in this epoch. These changes have dramatically transformed the very composition of the working class, the conditions of class struggle, and the process by which class consciousness develops. In the face of these transformations, it is no longer sufficient for revolutionaries to simply reassert the basic class lines that separate the historic

interests of the working class from that of capital, or to merely repeat the communist program as it was elaborated in the depths of

the counter-revolution by the organizations of the Communist Left. The heritage of the Communist Left is basic to Marxist revolutionaries today; it constitutes the theoretical and programmatic point of departure for our activity. Nonetheless, it is insufficient to constitute a theory adequate to the tasks facing revolutionaries in the waning years of the twentieth century, and preparing to confront the realities of capitalist barbarism that will face us in the first decade of the twenty first century. Until and unless Marxist revolutionaries face the reality of capitalism today, and grasp the transformations that have characterized it over the past several decades, their activity -- no matter how frenetic -- will be sterile, and their historic impact nil. The transformations of capitalism of which we speak absolutely require a response from revolutionaries. And that response in the first instance must be theoretical!

In order to focus the discussion and debate that is required of revolutionaries, let us briefly survey the changes in capitalism that demand a theoretical response.

In the period since the end of World War Two, capitalism entered the final stage of a long and complex process of development: the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital. Many of the most important texts of Marx, in which the bases of this transformation are adumbrated, only became available in the 1970's and 1980's. Their incorporation into the theoretical arsenal of Marxism has scarcely begun. Moreover, a whole series of issues that Marx himself could not have foreseen, generated by the fact that the transition from the formal to the real submission of labor to capital has occurred under the conditions of the decadence of capitalism, i.e. under conditions where the capitalist mode of production has ceased to be a condition for the development of the forces of production, has not yet become a subject of theoretical discussion by Marxist revolutionaries.

The transition from the formal to the

real domination of capital is integrally linked to the development of state capitalism. While the link between these two phenomena requires a theoretical effort on the part of Marxists in order to become clear, most revolutionaries continue to reduce state capitalism to its Stalinist form, and in a period characterized by the collapse of Stalinism, and policies of "privatization" in the countries previously ruled by Stalinist regimes, they completely fail to grasp the fact that state capitalism is a UNIVERSAL TENDENCY of capitalism, of which Stalinism was only one historical form. As a result, the swallowing of civil society by the state, the phenomenon of state totalitarianism, which has always been most advanced where capitalism is most developed, i.e. in the USA and Western Europe, and which is quite compatible with a "democratic", parliamentary facade, has yet to be theoretically grasped by most Marxist revolutionaries.

The completion of the transition to the real domination of capital, which occurs within the framework of state capitalism, also involves a transformation in the composition of the working class. Over the past several decades, capitalism has passed beyond the stage of Taylorism and its assembly-line production as the cutting edge of the capitalist organization of the labor process. This has involved not merely a transformation in the conditions of industrial production in its most advanced forms, but in a veritable recomposition of the working class. As a result, the traditional blue collar proletariat, the basis of Marxist theory for so many generations, and the vanguard of class struggle, is giving way to what Marx termed a *Gesamtarbeiter*, or collective worker, as the source of surplus-value. This collective worker is not merely the basis of the accumulation process in capitalism today, but must become the subject of revolution, the bearer of class consciousness, if capitalism is to be overthrown. Yet the very existence of this collective worker, the reality of a recomposition of the working class, is scarcely acknowledged in the revolutionary milieu, and is only just beginning to become a theoretical concern.

These changes in the accumulation process, in the organization of capital, and in the composition of the working class, are all occurring under conditions of capitalist barbarism. In the past, for Marxist revolutionaries, barbarism was largely understood in terms of world war between global imperialist blocs, and most recently in the spectre of thermonuclear war between the Russian and American blocs. With the collapse of the Russian bloc, and the breakup of the Soviet union (sic.), the danger of imperialist world war has receded for the moment (quite apart from the level of class struggle). However, the barbarism of

capitalism has accelerated as the spectre of thermonuclear war has receded, and in its place other manifestations of capitalist barbarism have come to the fore: starvation and famine afflict ever growing masses of humanity from Africa to the cities of Russia; a literal migration of peoples on a transcontinental scale -- in an effort to escape the effects of the quasi-total breakdown of social life in much of the Third World and the former Russian bloc -- has sent a flood of refugees to the capitalist metropolises; in the cities of the advanced capitalist countries, a vast and rapidly growing under-class, a marginal population existing completely outside the basic cycle of capitalist production, has arisen as a visible manifestation of the barbarism of a mode of production that can no longer even profitably exploit potential workers; xenophobia and racism, with their attendant ultra-nationalism and threat of pogroms, characterize both the Third World and the capitalist metropolises as social existence sinks into barbarism. All of these phenomena presage a series of wars in which genocide looms on the horizon: the murderous struggles between Serbs and Croats, and Azeris and Armenians, whatever their immediate outcome, and the technological mass murder inflicted on the mass of the Iraqi population by American imperialism, are so many harbingers of the pogroms and technicized genocides that capitalist barbarism has in store for the human species. To these manifestations of capitalist barbarism, must be added the prospects for irreversible ecological destruction wrought by a technology shaped by the imperatives of capital accumulation. All of these examples of the barbarism of capitalism must be theoretically comprehended if revolutionaries are to make their vital contribution to the overthrow of capitalism.

The above issues are by no means exhaustive. Other, no less important questions, deserve the urgent theoretical attention of revolutionaries. Thus, we must address the contradiction between the growing tendency of capital to freely move back and forth across frontiers, to take the whole of the globe as its field of action, on the one hand, and the necessity of capital to base itself on the state, nationalism, and militarism, in the face of the no less powerful tendencies to barbarism, and the need to maintain some kind of control over the mass of the population, on the other. What all of the questions discussed above have in common is their urgent summons to revolutionaries to take up their primordial theoretical tasks, to commit themselves to a project which will literally decide whether the coming era is to result in socialism or barbarism, in the creation of a human *Gemeinwesen* or the destruction of the human species.

The External Fraction of the ICC  
(Internationalist Perspective), 1991



## **Critique of a Book by the ICC**

# **The Legacy of the Dutch Left**

It's been a long time since any bourgeois publishing house or even any revolutionary group has published a history of the efforts of the German-Dutch Left Communist movement. Aside from a small circle of militants, it seems that no one today, in the absence of strong class struggle, is still interested in this current. But in 1991 the ICC finally put The Dutch Left on sale. Today, when the ruling class is burying what it claims is "communism" (in fact, it is really just the corpse of stalinism), this book will probably find few readers; too few readers, perhaps, with the critical spirit to see the theoretical importance of the legacy of the German-Dutch Left. In the 1970's, many of the books devoted to the history of this current echoed the hopes of the rising class struggle of that time but the situation today has made marxism all the harder to disseminate in the working class. All the programs and all the names have lost their meaning and everyone believes in everything and nothing.

Our group claims a heritage from the German-Dutch Left and we want very much to write about this book that documents the history of one of the rare marxist currents of the past 50 years to have fought against the counter-revolution. Three hundred pages is barely long enough to evoke the birth, development, change and decline of this political force that began in Germany and Holland during the revolutionary confrontations at the beginning of this century and spread to many other countries, including the U.S., in counter-revolutionary period. The book also deals with the adversaries of this current, those who were only too ready to spread lies and calomnies about Left Communism: from the bitter tirades of Radek, a former comrade of Pannekoek, to the heavy-handed humor of Zinoviev and the taunts of Trotsky, the great adversary of the "ultra-left" in the 30's.

This book expertly documents the history of the Left and the meaning of the many debates and splits that took place over the years. Of all the many volumes devoted to Left Communism in the last 20 years, this book is one of the best and most complete, the product of a

great socialist erudition. It is a model of unity in interpreting events over three-quarters of a century...and what a century! The epoch of wars and revolution. Although marxist history is suffering from a lack of serious contributions nowadays, it has certainly found an excellent expression here, documented with careful attention. Many interviews with the last remaining participants in the revolutionary wave of the 20's had to be conducted and a great deal of patient research in the libraries of many countries had to be carried out before the particularly scrupulous author of this work was ready for print.

This book effectively redefines the significance of a political current that expressed the radical revolutionary elan against capitalism in Germany. The revolutionaries of the German-Dutch Left shared the idea that the crisis of capitalism in the 20's was the final, mortal blow to the whole system. They declared that the crisis would lead to a revolution and they mobilized the forces of the working class so that the class could rid itself of reformist illusions. This idea was and continued to be the basis of their praxis despite the occasional taint of activism. But their errors were more fruitful than the dry "realism" of those who wanted to wait until all the conditions were met, until all the risks and imponderables could be somehow removed from the insurrection.

The prejudice, particularly strong among the bordigists, that accused German-Dutch Left Communism of being a form of anarchism has gradually died out. The work of Pannekoek, to which Lenin owed so much, and the work of Gorter, had nothing to do with anarchist ideology. In the German-Dutch left, it is not the "council communism" developed by Gorter and Pannekoek in hundreds of articles (many published by the Communist International itself) and dozens of books that is in any way akin to anarchism but the later "councilism" of the 1950's and 60's. In fact, the German-Dutch Left was in favor of a centralized, disciplined party that would be in the forefront of the fight for a dictatorship of the world proletariat in order to abolish wage labor.

The German-Dutch Left brought a solid theoretical structure to marxism. It expanded and renewed the original marxism that had been damaged by the hypocrisy of kautskyism. Pannekoek, Gorter and Roland-Holst were greatly respected in the Second International and at the beginning of the Third. The German-Dutch Left had a great reputation among the workers because of its many theoretical struggles: its contribution to the debates against Bernstein and revisionism, its defense of a revolutionary ethic in the class struggle, the rehabilitation of the general strike in a marxist context, the struggle against reformism and its lack of perspectives in economic struggles, its effort to demonstrate the limits of union-style activity, the conviction that socialism cannot be realized without class struggle and revolution, that it cannot be brought about by parliamentary majorities, and its critique of dominant ideology as the spiritual enslavement of the proletariat.

The German-Dutch Left worked towards building the political strength of the working class, towards building a party of the proletariat with clear functions and a firm commitment to principles. Thus, they formed the Tribunist movement in October 1907 which was fully supported by Lenin who argued for its admission into the ranks of the Second International. In November 1918, they formed the Dutch Communist Party even before the German party was formed and within the KPH they fought against the parliamentary and pro-Entente tendency of Ravenstein and Wijnkoop. They were involved in the formation of the KAPD in Germany at a national conference where a hundred oppositionists, formed in the school of Gorter and Pannekoek, met during Easter 1920. They were also involved in the formation of the KAPN in the Netherlands in 1921.

Is it necessary to point out that Gorter and Pannekoek were strict internationalists when war broke out in 1914? That they immediately participated in the Zimmerwald movement and that they greeted the October revolution in Russia with an outpouring of enthusiasm? They gave unconditional support to Lenin's slogan, "all power to the Soviets", which they saw as offering a new vision of communism after the deformations of the "centrist" Kautsky.

But the German-Dutch Left also stood for the struggle against the so-called flexible "tactics" of Lenin, against the mass partyism of the builders of the "Communist" parties. It stood for the fight against the rapid bureaucratic degeneration of the new Communist International that had fast become an instrument of the foreign policy of the "workers' state". The comrades of the

Left were opposed to the formation of huge mass parties and to accepting non-communist and politically compromised elements into these parties. With The Answer to Lenin, Gorter wrote one of the most important marxist pamphlets since The Communist Manifesto. Unfortunately, in its time, it was never widely available in the international proletarian movement because of the stranglehold of the official voices of the Communist International. In this pamphlet, Gorter made it clear that the proletariat in the West was much stronger than the proletariat in Russia had been. Therefore, the communist parties in Europe had to stand alone and on principle without needing the tactics used in the Russian experience. The German-Dutch Left intuitively felt that by imitating the political methods of Social-Democracy, Bolshevism was going to compromise its mission and make grave concessions to the peasant class. This is just what did happen.

The period of the emergence and greatest strength of the G-D Left was a period of great class struggle. With the formation of the KAPD, its most important party creation, the comrades laid out the essential principles of the period, rejecting the old ideas that the proletariat could no longer use, so that marxism itself could be renewed while remaining true to its nature. The principles developed by the G-D Left have remained a beacon for struggles over the past half century. Their position against the revolutionary nature of national liberation struggles is of particular importance today when eastern Europe is poised on the edge of the precipice. How can we doubt that nationalism is one of the most powerful forces that capitalism can whip up against a proletarian perspective? The comrades' insistence on destroying the instruments of power of the bourgeois state and the need to institute the power of workers' councils are still essential insights today. Also very timely is their position against "parliamentarism", a characteristic form of "struggle" which, in the era of decadence, has become a bastion of the counter-revolution. As to the "revolutionary parliamentarism" defended by Lenin, time has shown it to be just one more mystification distracting the working class from any real possibility of revolutionary struggle. The German-Dutch Left rejected unionism on the basis of the fact that it is impossible to improve the conditions of the working class in the period of the real domination of capital and on the basis of the total and definitive integration of the unions into the State apparatus as an instrument for the control of the working class. For these comrades, the cynical

unions were responsible for the deaths of thousands of workers and ought to be destroyed root and branch.

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A large part of this book is devoted to a critique of a tendency that rejected the need for any party in the proletariat. This tendency, and its theoretician Ruhle, was active in the KAPD and eventually formed the AAUD-E. They were the inspiration for later "councilism". The German-Dutch Left certainly had its weaknesses. No one is denying this. But the book criticizes these weaknesses from a hyper-organizational point of view, from a "leninist" angle of attack. It is as though the organization of revolutionaries were the beginning and the end of communism, which is far from the case. What makes it all seem like a repeat of the church for whom religion is the fount of all wisdom, is the idea that the organization is the touchstone of all our actions as militants. The book does refute the unionist current of Ruhle and Roche which, from within the AAUD-E, defended the idea of the revolution "on the shop floor" and direct control of the economy on each local level thereby bypassing the need to destroy the bourgeois state. In this critique, the book is correct. The book also criticizes the Ruhle tendency for calling for the immediate dissolution of the party in the class and for saying that all political forms, even those emanating from the working class itself, are negative influences on the development of consciousness. In this critique the book is also correct. But we are not so naive as to overlook the fact that in the hands of the ICC, this book will just serve as one more piece of ammunition in the war to destroy those little groups refusing to join with the ICC. These groups are, for the ICC, what the "incurable ultra-leftists" (like the Italian Left of Bilan) were for Trotsky in the thirties because the so-called ultra-left (Left Communists) refused to join the Trotskyist Fourth International. The ICC has already begun to exploit this angle of the book. echoes of it appear in that organization's recent "Call to the Proletarian Political Milieu" full of bile for the so-called "parasitical" little groups.

This book on the German-Dutch Left is a double-edged sword on the question of the unity of revolutionaries. Because the organization is only a means to achieve the revolution, we as marxists are first revolutionaries and then, centralized and disciplined. We are not tied to the fetishism of the organization and unity that afflicts the ICC. Our "faith" is not in the party, as the religious in their

church, but in the goal of communism.

It can be said that a group exists for the class struggle but, in fact, it exists because of the class struggle. The party is not the savior; it is communism alone that can help the working class. A degenerating organization can publish a pamphlet on the Dutch Left, and, at the same time, write an article rehabilitating Trotsky by claiming that he was an true communist who never crossed the Rubicon of the class line. This same organization, the ICC, presents the purely individual work of one of its members (this book) as the product of a collective advance and the supposed teamwork of the organization as a whole. Nonsense. From experience we know how the division of labor operates in that organization and how the roles are distributed. To the talented, the task of theoretical elaboration and the writing of theses; to the others, the tasks of foot soldiers. With the principle of anonymity that the ICC gets from bordigism, there is no easier way to pass things off as collective work. The difference between the "homage" paid to the German-Dutch Left in this book and the real practices of the ICC is too great. It is all so far from the lessons of the G-D Left. The book is intended as a sort of erudite fig leaf, hiding the organization's immediatist perspectives and its slide to sectarianism. From the early days of our tendency, we severely criticized the ICC for its activism in interventions in the class. And we said that the ICC had gone from an organization built on discussions about the program and principles to an instrument of smug self-satisfaction. From a healthy criticism of "leninism", it changed to apologies for "leninism" and the Bolshevik mythology.

Without open discussion and the struggle of tendencies, the proletariat cannot find its way. This book quite correctly rejects the notion of monolithism (p 263). But there are many inconsistencies to be found here. The book's rejection of councilism seems to lead to an underestimation of the danger of substitutionism (p 180). It all but eliminates the importance of the GIK's critique of a rigid organization of professional revolutionaries claiming to lead a "trade unionist" class (one of the leninist conceptions). But then the book turns around to salute the "Communistenbund" which rejected the deadly discipline of "leninism" and the absolute rule of the majority. Yet that is exactly how the ICC functions today with its reliance on obedience and hierarchical discipline as soon as any divergences appear. The same ultra-centralism and the same suppression of

fractions that was used to attack the Communist Left in its time is now the common coin of the ICC.

Any contribution to history contains its share of errors and this book is no exception. When the book deals with the USPD, the German party during and after World War I, it carries the mark of the ICC. These so-called "Independents" of the USPD formed the extreme left-wing of the bourgeoisie, the most dangerous component of the counter-revolution. The book is silent on the fact that most of the workers who supported this party rejected the need for any violent revolution; that the cadres of the USPD fought against the AAUD slogan, "Leave the unions". It says nothing about the fact that the USPD channeled the confused revolt of the masses into electioneering for the ballot box and that it wanted to emasculate the Workers' Councils in Germany by converting them into legal appendages of the bourgeois State. The whole reality of the counter-revolutionary nature of left Social-Democracy is hidden behind a flow of words that do not address the fundamental question of the class nature of this party that almost succeeded in swallowing up the Spartacists. The rapprochement between the German Socialist Party and the newly-formed Communist Party after World War I is, at most, seen as a slide towards "opportunism" (p 107).

There is worse : the book contains a critique of the Basic Principles of Communist Production and Distribution, (the major theoretical contribution of the German-Dutch Left on the question of the period of transition from capitalism to communism), which claims that under communism, "there will still be a struggle for better working conditions" (p 197). If we understand this critique, the law of value and class struggle will continue to exist under communism. It seems more like this critique confuses communism with state capitalism where workers have to continue to struggle against an exploitative system. But under communism, as we understand it, capital and labor, bourgeois and proletarian, will have disappeared. In our opinion, the book's critique is entirely mistaken.

Many times and in many ways we have defended the theoretical legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, marxism's most authentic voice, not out of any sentimental attachment but because of the way she used the critical method of marxism. But in spite of herself, Luxemburg slowed down the revolt of the masses against the powerful bureaucracy of German Social Democracy in the revolutionary period. She hindered the "radicals" as they struggled to break away from the

traitorous Social Democracy, as they tried to hurry the formation of new organizations for the workers' revolt. Even in 1909, she disapproved of the Tribunists' split, considering it a blow to unity. Years later, Luxemburg justified the Spartacists joining the USPD because she didn't want "to cut herself off from the masses". At the Spartacusbund Congress in 1918 that would finally give birth to the Communist Party in Germany, she spoke in favor of electoral participation because she still thought of it as a way of educating the masses; she felt that the task of the workers' councils was to replace the unions. On an organizational level, she was very reticent about joining the new Communist International. She did not draw all the political consequences of her analysis of imperialism.

To the left of Luxemburg were the "Linksradicalen" and the "Lichtstrahlen" groups that were theoretically influenced by Pannekoek, who had taught the history of materialism and social theory in the Socialist Party school in Berlin. The radicals were farther advanced in their rejection of the theory and practice of Social Democracy and in their realization of the need for new ways to go about class struggle. But in the book, people like Becker, Borchardt and Knief are hardly mentioned even though they defended clear class perspectives for their time. Organized together since 1913, their organizational split with the Second International shows that there is often no other way for revolutionaries to continue their work of political clarification and programmatic development than to leave established organizations. In the few pages he devotes to this tendency (p 42,43,44), the author does not accept the idea that it was necessary to break off from Social Democracy as soon as possible and that this was the only way to prepare for any positive role in the social upheaval that was coming. In any case, it is, therefore, incorrect to claim that the German-Dutch Left was formed in the wake of the German revolution (p 1).

But the author doesn't forget to condemn the KAPD's split with the Third International at its Third Congress. He doesn't forget to lecture the KAPD on how they should have accepted their own death knell by agreeing to join the VSPD and to work for electoralism and unionism once again. By 1921, the internal atmosphere of the Third International was already infected by bourgeois ideology seeping into all the territorial sections. This disease became definitive with the gradual defeat of world revolution. Contrary to the book's assertion, the KAPD's split with Moscow was not "too hasty" and Gorter was not the evil genius

who turned the head of his friend Schroeder, the political leader of the KAPD.

To say that after the Copenhagen Conference in 1935, we can no longer speak of a council communism, as the author states on page 2, is a gross exaggeration. In fact, 1935 is a turning point between the German-Dutch Left

Communist movement with all its splits and splinters and the "council communist" movement that was its heir. Council communism was an expression of the weaknesses of the German proletariat but also of its continued will to live despite the bleak historical period. The theoretical work of the GIK (council communists) with the collaboration of elements of the KAPD like Jan Appel along with an active intervention in the class, the printing of the revue International Council Communism (October 1934 to December 1937) in the United States which grew into Living Marxism (February 1938 to Fall 1941) and then New Essays (1944-1949) due to the perseverance of Paul Mattick, Pannekoek's theoretical work and his writings under the name of Harper in the US and in the Southern Advocate Workers' Council in Melbourne, Australia (from 1944-1949) -- this is the legacy of council communism. All this shows that council communism, with the participation of Karl Korsch, was able to create a breathing space for revolutionary thought where the events of the period could be analyzed and understood. It is wrong to say, as the book does on page 182, that council communism refused to draw up a balance sheet of the period and that only the Italian Left was able to do this.

Many aspects of Gorter's book An Answer to Lenin were clarified in the work of council communism. Against the bureaucratic, mechanistic concept of struggle being the product of the organization, council communism offered a more correct view of organization as the product of the struggle. During the thirties and forties, council communism deepened an understanding of state capitalism on the basis of the statification of the economy in Germany, the absence of the private sector in Russia and the New Deal in the U.S. It characterized the planned economy as a form of exploitation of the working class. Ruhle showed that the tendency towards state capitalism was inevitable given the depth of the world crisis. Council Communism strengthened the critique of the "united front tactic" and rejected all participation in "popular fronts". For the GIK, and more for Korsch, there was no doubt that the first signs of a proletarian revolution had appeared in Spain in July 1936 when the workers rose up against Franco. But there

was no question of supporting any democratic wing of the ruling class against the fascist wing. In this, the GIK agreed with the Ligue Communiste Internationaliste in Belgium (Hennault), with Union Communiste in France (Chaze) and the Workers' Revolutionary League in the U.S. (Oehler). But for the author of this book, on this question the GIK did not possess the coherence of the Italian Communist Left (p 225) which "was always right", the only revolutionaries to have had the correct line at all times!

Of course Socialisme ou Barbarie managed to evolve a considerable way from its original Trotskyist positions but without getting to the fundamental positions of the German-Dutch Left. Its links with the GIK were distant. In the 40 issues of its revue, this group never made any kind of study of the German Left. Cardan never made any effort to make the German-Dutch Left better known despite the existence of a council communist minority within SouB, the people who later formed ICO (p 282). ICO published a very appreciable number of the important texts of the German-Dutch Left, particularly the republication of Gorter's Answer to Lenin in French with the collaboration of the magazine Cahiers du Communisme de Conseil which the book wants at all costs to throw onto the "councilist" scrap heap. It is very important to note that on the eve of 1968, ICO was supported and counseled by Daad en Gedachte (C. Brendel and T. Masassen) and Chaze from the former Union Communiste (which contrary to the assertions of this book-- p 234-- was not a group that came from Trotskyism even though many of the members who joined it did so after breaking with Trotskyist ideology). As far as the Internationale Situationniste is concerned (p 3), it never managed to get beyond the voluntarist ideas and individualistic practices of dadaism.

It influenced only a small number of students rebelling against authority and their father, only to take their place. Full of its own "originality", it disdainfully decided to ignore the contributions of the German-Dutch Left which it considered too "ouvrierist". And of course it denigrated any contribution from ICO or Revolution Internationale, the forerunner of the ICC. We also find it very dangerous to situate the German-Dutch Left to the left of Trotskyism (p 297), because the G-D Left clearly considered the Fourth International to be on the other side of the class line.

It is so painful to hear the book speak about the "Dutch school of marxism" (p 101). This epithet was a sarcastic reference coined by the Bolsheviks who excelled at the game of making up nasty labels for opponents. Gorter and



Pannekoek wanted to do something to save workers' power in Russia. They intuitively felt the degeneration of the Russian leaders because of their positions in the apparatus of the "workers' state". They totally condemned the dictatorship of the party over the class and protested against Moscow's ideological domination of the Comintern. None of this pleased the Bolsheviks of course and they wrote Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder to counter the influence of Gorter and Pannekoek and cut away any support for them.

In these days of great unemployment, it's good to remember that through their analyses of the absolute pauperization of the working class and interventions among the unemployed, council communist groups were still active in the thirties in Holland and attracted a growing number of the unemployed who wanted to form "unemployed councils". During the great misery of the Depression, council communists were able to become the spokesmen of millions of workers who were thrown out on the street. The proportion of unskilled workers and the unemployed was always high among the German-Dutch Left which offered them some scope for political activity.

The rejection of the need for a class party by O. Ruhle and C. Meijer, their rejection of the proletarian nature of the Bolshevik party (to them the Bolsheviks merely represented the radical intelligentsia), their assertion that the Russian revolution was an anti-feudal but not a proletarian revolution -- these positions are not shared by us. These are the errors of council communism, an abandoning of class positions influenced by the reflux in class struggle. But Ruhle and Meijer never hesitated in any way over the principle of internationalism. They refused to think in nationalistic terms and felt that all the problems of the revolution were international ones; that class struggle does not end at national borders and that, therefore, the organization of revolutionaries had to be international, too. It goes without saying that council communists saw the USSR as an imperialist power and that they clearly rejected national defense during World War II. With a solid analysis of economic contradictions, they always maintained that the historic difficulties of accumulation would doom the capitalist system. If socialism was going to come, it would come through the developed nations and not from the colonies because for council communism, the industrial proletariat is the bearer of communism. It proclaimed that a socialist society can only exist on the basis of the direct participation of the producers in all

discussions and decision-making.

The council communist position on the party should not be made into a joke. They did not say that it was a "study club" (p 189) or a "letter box" (p 280). The GIK criticized the type of party that wants to organize and command the working class rather than a party based on the idea of the self-emancipation of the class, but it did keep the notion of the party. But for them, with the reflux in class struggle, the party changed its function and form. It became a federation of working groups with only a certain amount of cohesion.

In 1954, Pannekoek talked about the need to carry on theoretical activity, studies and discussions linked to the primary task of communicating with workers. This is what Pannekoek wrote to Chaulieu (Cardan from SouB), "But this task of the avant-garde is not different from the task of the party as a whole. It has to fulfill its task with the class and in the class, as an integral part of the class, not separate from it or outside it, much less against it" (SouB #14, p 48). For Pannekoek, the concept of spontaneity was no reason to reject the existence of a party. Council communism is only anti-party to the substitutionists for whom the working class may play a necessary role but a role subordinated to the power of the command-base of the party. The concern to form an avant-garde based on clear positions with the task of defending these positions in the struggle was always at the heart of the German-Dutch Left, the KAPD, the AAUD and the KAI.

Council communism, whose roots are firmly proletarian, must be clearly distinguished from "councilism", which, in the tradition of the AAUD-E, rejected any activity of the party in the name of not wanting to interfere in the class. In relation to council communism, councilism is a real regression towards anarchist, even social democratic, positions. It exalts the "producer" in capitalism; it is characterized by a pronounced focus on the individual factory, an uncritical "suivism" in regard to strikes, a total rejection of any separate organization, and a decided political ambiguity on the subject of third worldism. But as marginal as it is, councilism, the great bogeyman of the ICC, remains an element of the revolutionary milieu. It has offered some insights which could be the envy of those marxists who only know how to offer pap or repetitious dogma when it comes to theory. There's no reason to fall on councilism as the ICC seems to enjoy doing with its "theory" of "councilism, the greatest danger for the working class", linked to the "centrists oscillations of the working classes". All this is based on the idea that the class,

because of the ideological battering it takes from the ruling class, becomes incapable of leading its struggle onto a political terrain. This is just a rehash of the more blatant substitutionism of What is to Be Done? which Luxemburg and others denounced so fervently.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Pannekoek never used the adjective "councilist" that was so fashionable among the bordigists and now in the ICC. Pannekoek always used the word council communist. He also never used the term self-management which in his time had an anarchist coloration. For lack of another word, we sometimes use "councilist" too but we attach no special meaning to it and have no hidden agenda about it.

With the twin faces of "democracy" and "fascism", the counter-revolution imprisoned hundreds of Left Communists in internment camps and jails; hundreds of "red" fighters went back into the KPD and several of them even gained high political positions in the Germany of Pankow. Others returned to the old rattletrap of Social Democracy.

Resignation and fatalism grow out of defeat but some militants who refuse to think in the logic of capitalism can survive to support the struggle. This, too, we can see in the history of the German-Dutch Left. Because they were organizations of the revolutionary period, the KAPD and the AAUD could not, as such, survive the counter-revolution. It is clear that they ceased to count as a proletarian force; they lost all influence in the class and broke up into dozens of splinter groups and tendencies. But the exhaustion of groups does not mean that their ideas totally disappear. The ideas of the German-Dutch Left continued to exist through all the splits and changes. The German-Dutch Left changed its form but not its nature. Even in an altered form, the G-D Left left a legacy in the years of reconstruction after the Second World War through the Spartacusbond which, in 1945, became a council communist organization when the principal members of the GIK joined it. This rather large proletarian organization was the leading revolutionary group in Holland and very present in the workers' struggles in Amsterdam, Deventer and Rotterdam.

Its 1945 Theses defended the positive role of the revolutionary party in mass movements. Daad en Gedachte left the Spartacusbond in 1964 and became the leading light of councilism.

It is clear that the ICC wants to show that it has the only correct interpretation of the pre-history and the history of the G-D Left. So it highlights the parts that will serve its struggle

against "councilism" and leaves in the dark whatever bothers it. A current of thought that prepared and participated in a revolution cannot disappear unless the proletariat itself disappears as the only revolutionary force in this society. On this question, the book which is, after all, a partisan history of the G-D Left, lacks clarity (p 293). Today it is stalinist ideology that has died, not the theory of the proletariat. The voice of the G-D Left remains alive as long as there are militants who have not forgotten how to learn. It is not by repeating and shouting principles that they become real and universal but by constantly confronting and contrasting these principles with a social reality in constant transformation. This confrontation can only work to the benefit of the legacy of the German-Dutch Left which understood the new historic course of its time, unlike "leninism", which only "radicalized" the old Social Democratic methods. In the body of work left by the G-D L, we can find the most advanced efforts to understand the problems raised by the period of the First World War. Better than all the other fractions that survived the debacle of the end of the Communist International, the German-Dutch Left understood the significance of the workers' councils. We cannot conceive of a future political organization of the class that will not rely on and be inspired by the insights it has given us.

R.C.

# OUR POSITIONS

The external Fraction of the International Communist Current claims a continuity with the programmatic framework developed by the ICC before its degeneration. This programmatic framework is itself based on the successive historical contribution of the Communist League, of the I, II and III Internationals and of the Left Fractions which detached themselves from the latter, in particular the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communists. After being de facto excluded from the ICC following the struggle that it waged against the political and organizational degeneration of that Current, the Fraction now continues its work of developing revolutionary consciousness outside the organizational framework of the ICC.

The Fraction defends the following basic principles, fundamental lessons of the class struggle :

Since World War I, capitalism has been a decadent social system which has nothing to offer the working class and humanity as a whole except cycles of crises, war and reconstruction. Its irreversible historical decay poses a single choice for humanity : either socialism or barbarism.

The working class is the only class able to carry out the communist revolution against capitalism.

The revolutionary struggle of the proletariat must lead to a general confrontation with the capitalist state. Its class violence is carried out in the mass action of revolutionary transformation. The practice of terror and terrorism, which expresses the blind violence of the state and of the desperate petty-bourgeoisie respectively, is alien to the proletariat.

In destroying the capitalist state, the working class must establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, as a transition to communist society. The form that this dictatorship will take is the international power of the Workers' Councils.

Communism or socialism means neither "self-management" nor "nationalization". It requires the conscious abolition by the proletariat of capitalist social relations and institutions such as wage-labor, commodity production, national frontiers, class divisions and the state apparatus, and is based on a unified world human community.

The so-called "socialist countries" (Russia, the Eastern bloc, China, Cuba, etc.) are a particular expression of the universal tendency to state capitalism, itself an expression of the decay of capitalism. There are no "socialist countries"; these are just so many capitalist bastions that the proletariat must destroy like any other capitalist state.

In this epoch, the trade unions everywhere are organs of capitalist discipline within the proletariat. Any policy based on working in the unions, whether to preserve or "transform" them, only serves to

subject the working class to the capitalist state and to divert it from its own necessary self-organization.

In decadent capitalism, parliaments and elections are nothing but sources of bourgeois mystification. Any participation in the electoral circus can only strengthen this mystification in the eyes of the workers.

The so-called "workers" parties, "Socialist" and "Communist", as well as their extreme left appendages, are the left face of the political apparatus of capital.

Today all factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. Any tactics calling for "Popular Fronts", "Anti-Fascist Fronts" or "United Fronts" between the proletariat and any faction of the bourgeoisie can only serve to derail the struggle of the proletariat and disarm it in the face of the class enemy.

So-called "national liberation struggles" are moments in the deadly struggle between imperialist powers large and small to gain control over the world market. The slogan of "support for people in struggle" amounts, in fact, to defending one imperialist power against another under nationalist or "socialist" verbiage.

The victory of the revolution requires the organization of revolutionaries into a party. The role of a party is neither to "organize the working class" nor to "take power in the name of the workers", but through its active intervention to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat.

## ACTIVITY OF THE FRACTION

In the present period characterized by a general rise in the class struggle and at the same time by a weakness on the part of revolutionary organizations and the degeneration of the pole of regroupment represented by the ICC, the Fraction has as its task to conscientiously take on the two functions which are basic to revolutionary organizations:

1) The development of revolutionary theory on the basis of the historic acquisitions and experiences of the proletariat, so as to transcend the contradictions of the Communist Lefts and of the present revolutionary milieu, in particular on the questions of class consciousness, the role of the party and the conditions imposed by state capitalism.

2) Intervention in the class struggle on an international scale, so as to be a catalyst in the process which develops in workers' struggles towards consciousness, organization and the generalized revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The capacity to form a real class party in the future depends on the accomplishment of these tasks by the present revolutionary forces. This requires, on their part, the will to undertake a real clarification and open confrontation of communist positions by rejecting all monolithism and sectarianism.